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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of schools are implementing conflict resolution programs to help students use nonviolent strategies to deal with conflict. This paper outlines the six steps of the Vollmer-Drook Conflict Resolution Curriculum, designed for use with grades kindergarten through 8. An introduction describes the pilot project, conducted at the Falk Laboratory School of the University of Pittsburgh in 1996-97, in which the Knopf Conflict Resolution Curriculum was adapted for the elementary school population. The findings of the pilot study indicated that primary school students frequently began to use conflict resolution strategies independent of adult intervention. The six steps of the adapted curriculum are then outlined: (1) defining conflict; (2) identifying feelings and actions; (3) dealing with anger; (4) building communication skill; (5) brainstorming; and (6) practicing communication and brainstorming skills. One lesson plan is presented for each step; each lesson plan includes the objective, materials needed, a warm-up activity, procedures, closure, and the rationale for the step. Appended to the document are visual materials used in the lessons. (KB)

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Conflict Resolution Techniques for Early Elementary

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Forward

The Vollmer-Drook Conflict Resolution Curriculum presented in this paper was made possible by a grant from the National Association of Laboratory Schools (NALS). This paper was presented at the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), David Lawrence Convention Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, (May, 1998).

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable part of life. More and more schools are implementing conflict resolution programs to help students deal with strife. While conflict resolution programs are as varied as the schools that use them, they all have one common element. They teach students to solve conflict through nonviolent strategies.

Beliefs about conflict influence reactions to controversy. By dealing with conflict in non-threatening situations, students gain valuable insights about their own feelings and the feelings of others. They begin to explore alternative reactions to conflict and begin to anticipate possible consequences of their actions.

In the 1996-97 school year, Falk Laboratory School, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, implemented a school-wide conflict resolution program for grades K-8. A team of teachers attended workshops to advance their understanding of conflict resolution theory. Invited speakers attended faculty meetings and discussed various conflict resolution models. The faculty previewed existing conflict resolution curricula, videos, and journal articles. The general consensus of the faculty was to adapt the Knopf Conflict Resolution Curriculum (Knopf, 1995) for the laboratory school student population.

In the summer of 1996, activities were selected from the Knopf curriculum that met the needs of the student population. Age appropriate activities were chosen for the primary, intermediate and middle school levels. K-8 level planning insured a common vocabulary. Students were able to relate through common experiences.

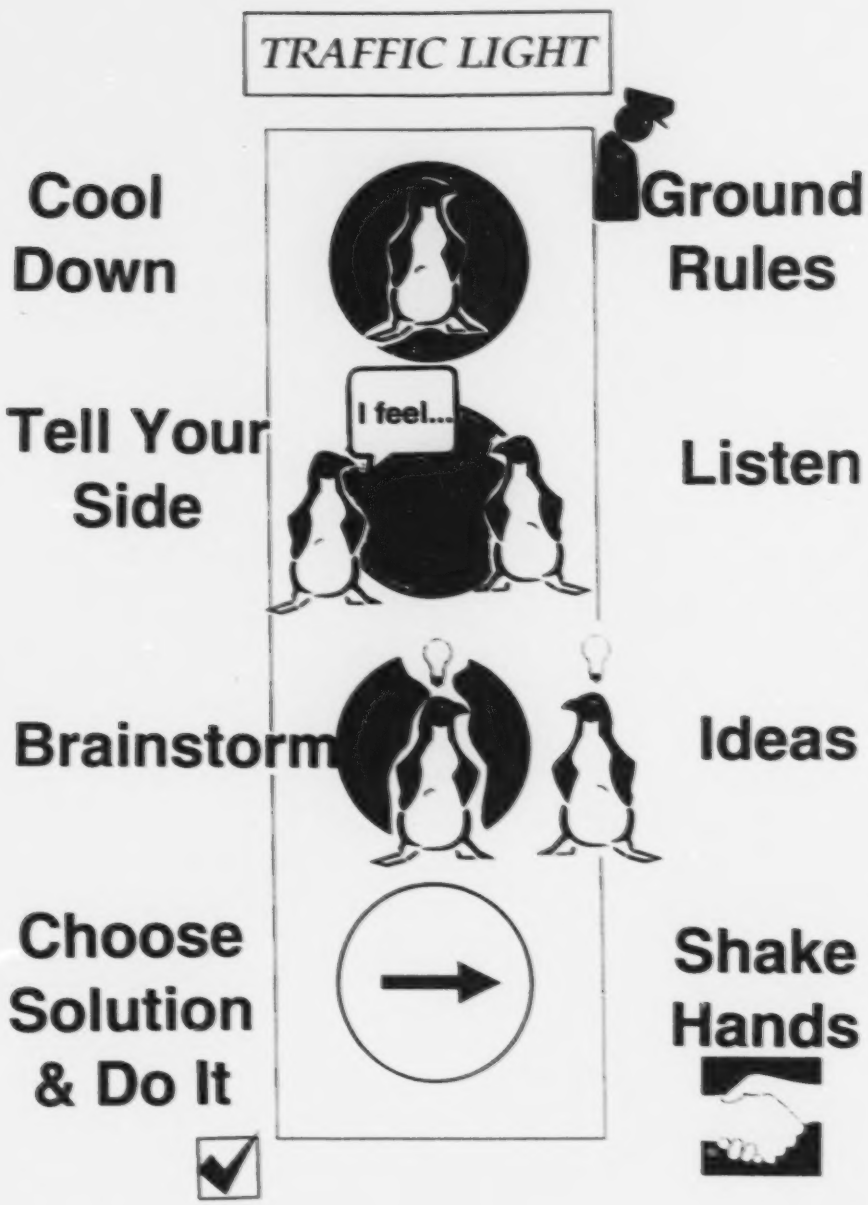
Initially in the pilot implementation year, the conflict resolution program was presented to all faculty through an inservice training session. During this pilot stage, refinements in activities and teaching strategies were ongoing, particularly at the primary grade level. It was recognized that an essential variable in conflict resolution was to teach the basics of conflict resolution early.

Students who are familiar with the steps for solving conflicts can resolve issues with minimal teacher support. The process involved in conflict resolution requires guidance and continued practice for it to become a lifelong skill. The strategies presented in this paper facilitate that process at the primary grade level.

The process involves the steps in the following traffic light (Figure 1). The traffic light graphically outlines how to facilitate conflict resolution. The following 6 steps systematically teach the process.

This paper outlines each step. The steps are described by stating the objectives and procedures. Following each step is a brief rationale. Visuals for each of the 6 steps are referenced in the Appendices.

Figure 1


TRAFFIC LIGHT
Cool Down
Ground Rules
Tell Your Side
I feel...
Listen
Brainstorm
Ideas
Choose Solution & Do It
Shake Hands

Step 1: Defining Conflict

Objective:
Students will be able to define conflict.
Students will be able to restate information.

Materials:
Musical instrument (optional)

Warm-up: *The Name Game*
1. Create a musical rhythm (Examples: 3 drum beats or 2 triangle chimes).

2. After the musical rhythm the student says his/her name and does a body motion or gesture (Example: thumbs up).

3. Repeat sequence for each student:
   3 drum beats....."Jackie".....thumbs up
   (rhythm) (name) (motion)

4. Everyone repeats in unison.

5. Continue the process until each student performs his/her own name and motion.

Procedures:
1. Ask students to name conflict situations or disagreements. Record ideas (Example: web, conflict map, etc.).

2. Ask students to think about what the word conflict means. Develop a simple definition.

Closure:
Tell the students that they will learn more about conflict and ways to solve problems with other people.

Rationale: The warm-up activity is both motivational and purposeful. It establishes an interactive atmosphere that promotes active listening.
Step 1 prepares students to tell their perspectives of conflict situations. Students will arrive at a workable definition for conflict. This will ensure the use of a common vocabulary.

Step 2: Feelings and Actions

Objectives:
Students will be able to identify feelings /actions related to conflicts.
Students will be able to identify consequences of actions.

Materials:
ball, Feeling and Actions (visual #1), 2 puppets (optional)

Warm-up: *Listening Relay*
1. State an "I" message: "I like to eat ice cream."

2. Pass the ball to one student.

3. The student with the ball must restate the message: "You like to eat ice cream."

4. The student with the ball restates the original message ("I like to eat ice cream.") and passes the ball to the next student.

5. Continue the process until everyone has had a turn to state and restate the message.

6. The game may be repeated throughout the year. More complex sentences may be used.

Procedures:
1. Review the definition of conflict.

2. Use puppets to tell an open-ended story about two characters who have a conflict. Example: "It's mine, not yours" dilemma.

3. Ask students to think of feelings that the puppets might have before or during the conflict.

4. Have students brainstorm actions that the puppets may take when dealing with one of the feelings. Record responses on the Feelings and Action visual # 1.

5. Students discuss the results of each action. Will the situation get better or worse?

Closure:
Why is it important to know more than one way to handle a conflict?
How will you act differently the next time you are in a conflict?

Rationale: The warm-up activity prepares the students to relate to the opinion of other students. The "restating strategy" in the listening relay fosters listening and recognition of an opinion. Utilizing the Feeling and Action visual enables students to map out both acceptable and nonacceptable actions.

Step 3: Anger

Objectives:
Students will be able to identify basic feelings.
Students will be able to name ways to express anger that do not physically or emotionally hurt anyone.

Materials:
Owl's Proverb visual #2
Feeling Faces visual #3

Warm-up:
Feeling Faces

1. Display the Feeling Faces visual #3 and discuss the feelings expressed by each face.

2. Have a volunteer select a feeling face, name the feeling the face expresses, and then show how *they* look when they are experiencing that feeling.

Procedures: *Anger Brainstorm*

1. Students name ways to express anger. Record actions (possibly on visual #1). (Let's Talk About Feeling Angry by Joy Berry may be used to generate ideas.)

2. Students determine which actions may be physically or emotionally harmful. Cross out those actions.

3. Highlight remaining actions. Discuss these actions in concrete detail. Example: If "talk about it" is listed, discuss appropriate words, tone of voice, body language, etc.

4. Display the Owl's Proverb Visual #2. Discuss the meaning of the proverb.

Closure:
Why is it important to know more than one way to handle anger?
How will you act differently the next time you feel angry?

Rationale: The owl proverb visual reminds the students to think how to express anger in appropriate ways. It is beneficial to display this visual in the classroom.

Step 4: Skill Building Communication

Objective:
Students will practice the "I" message using the Ground Rules.

Materials:
Ground Rules visual #4
Anger Thermometer visual #5

Warm-up:
Show a real thermometer. Children will observe what happens when it is placed in hot or cold water. Display Anger Thermometer visual #5 and discuss rising degrees of anger. Refer to Anger Thermometer when discussing "cool down."

Procedure:
1. Initiate a short discussion with students about ground rules.
   Display the conflict resolution ground rules visual #4
   Talk about the five ground rules:
   How can they be helpful?
   What happens if each person does not use them?

2. Demonstrate a hand signal for each part of the "I" message.
   "I feel" (place crossed arms over heart)
   "when" (extend hands outward with palms upward)
   "and I want" (close palms of extended hands and move up and down)
   Practice the hand signals until students have grasped the script of the "I" message.

3. Present a conflict e.g., one child takes another child's toy. The "I" message would be: "I feel sad when you take my toy and I want you to give it back."
   Ask for two volunteers. Assign each a puppet to role play the conflict situation.
   Coach Puppet B to use the "I" statement (I feel___when___and I want___).
   Coach Puppet A to reflectively restate what Puppet B has said. Then have Puppets A and B switch roles.

4. After several volunteers have demonstrated the "I" message basic dialogue script conclude by having everyone repeat the "I" message with the hand signals.

Rationale: Recognizing natural feelings of anger is of prime importance. If recognized, it can be managed constructively. The ground rules provide the framework to express anger without blame. To restate the "I" message guarantees reflective listening.

Step 5: Brainstorming Process

Objective:
Students will practice the brainstorming process.

Materials:
Win/Win visual #6
Guidelines for Brainstorming visual #7

Warm-up: *Mind Game*

1. Practice the brainstorming process by playing the Mind Game. The Mind Game is played by saying the first thing that comes to mind when given a situation. Example: How many ways can you prepare an egg?

2. A discussion should follow noting that not all conflicts have simple and evident solutions. Problem solving takes time and a willingness to come up with lots of ideas. Discuss compromise and the idea of "win/win" solutions using Win/Win visual #6. Emphasize that each student should feel good about the solution.

Procedures:

1. Display the Guidelines for Brainstorming visual #7
   Talk about the four guidelines and how they help the brainstorming process.

2. Give students a toilet paper roll. Brainstorm possible things you can make from this tube. Tell each student to take a tube home and use one of the ideas. After a designated period of time review what each student created. Products need not be brought to school, but a follow-up discussion should be planned.

Rationale: Brainstorming fosters exploration of multiple solutions. These activities bring about a discussion in order to encourage decision making, negotiation, and resolution.

Step 6: Putting It All Together

Objective:
Students will practice the combined skills of communication and brainstorming using the basic conflict resolution format.

Warm-up:
Students will discuss the functions of a real traffic light.

Materials:
Traffic Light visual #8

Procedures:
1. Display the Traffic Light visual #8. Present each step of the traffic light. Have students recall how they practiced each step during the previous lesson activities.

2. Present a conflict situation. Ask for volunteers to go through the conflict resolution steps of the Traffic Light. Coach when needed. Practice.

Closure:
What are some positive outcomes of using the Traffic Light?
What steps of the Traffic Light seem easy/difficult for you?

Rationale: Through role play and simulation students are able to make application to real life situations when they occur.

Conclusion

Peer conflict in the classroom is not new. Emphasis on conflict resolution has, however, become a priority educational goal for the new millennium. This is due in part to escalating school violence. Traditionally adults have tried to prevent conflict or intervene. Recent theory and research, however, suggest that peer conflict is an important variable in social interaction (Rende & Killen, 1992; Ross & Conant, 1992). Focus is now on helping children develop conflict resolution strategies as a part of their early childhood socialization process (Ramsey, 1991). Early childhood conflict resolution strategies stress less adult intervention.

In the Vollmer-Drook Conflict Resolution Curriculum pilot program primary aged students frequently began to utilize strategies independent of adult intervention. The student initiated conflict resolution strategies were promoted by the sequential instruction in the six steps. Students would use the traffic light guidelines to come up with workable solutions to their conflicts.

It would be far too simplistic to say that the six step process is the cure all to conflict resolution in the primary grade classroom. Basically it serves as a framework that builds the foundation for nonaggressive responses to conflict situations. Teachers who begin with the curriculum soon adapt it to their own student population and teaching style. The Owl Proverb displayed in the classroom provides that "teachable moment" visual when students need a quick reminder that their behavior is not appropriate.

A basic limitation in using the Vollmer-Drook Conflict Resolution Curriculum is the assumption that the students involved have a foundation in character education as well. A conflict resolution technique will not serve any useful purpose if students do not respect and value each other. The conflict resolution curriculum supplied the vehicle to apply ethical behavior.

APPENDIX

CONTENTS:

VISUAL # 1: FEELING AND ACTIONS

VISUAL #2: OWL'S PROVERB

VISUAL #3: FEELING FACES

VISUAL #4: GROUND RULES

VISUAL #5: ANGER THERMOMETER

VISUAL #6: WIN/WIN

VISUAL #7: BRAINSTORMING

Actions:

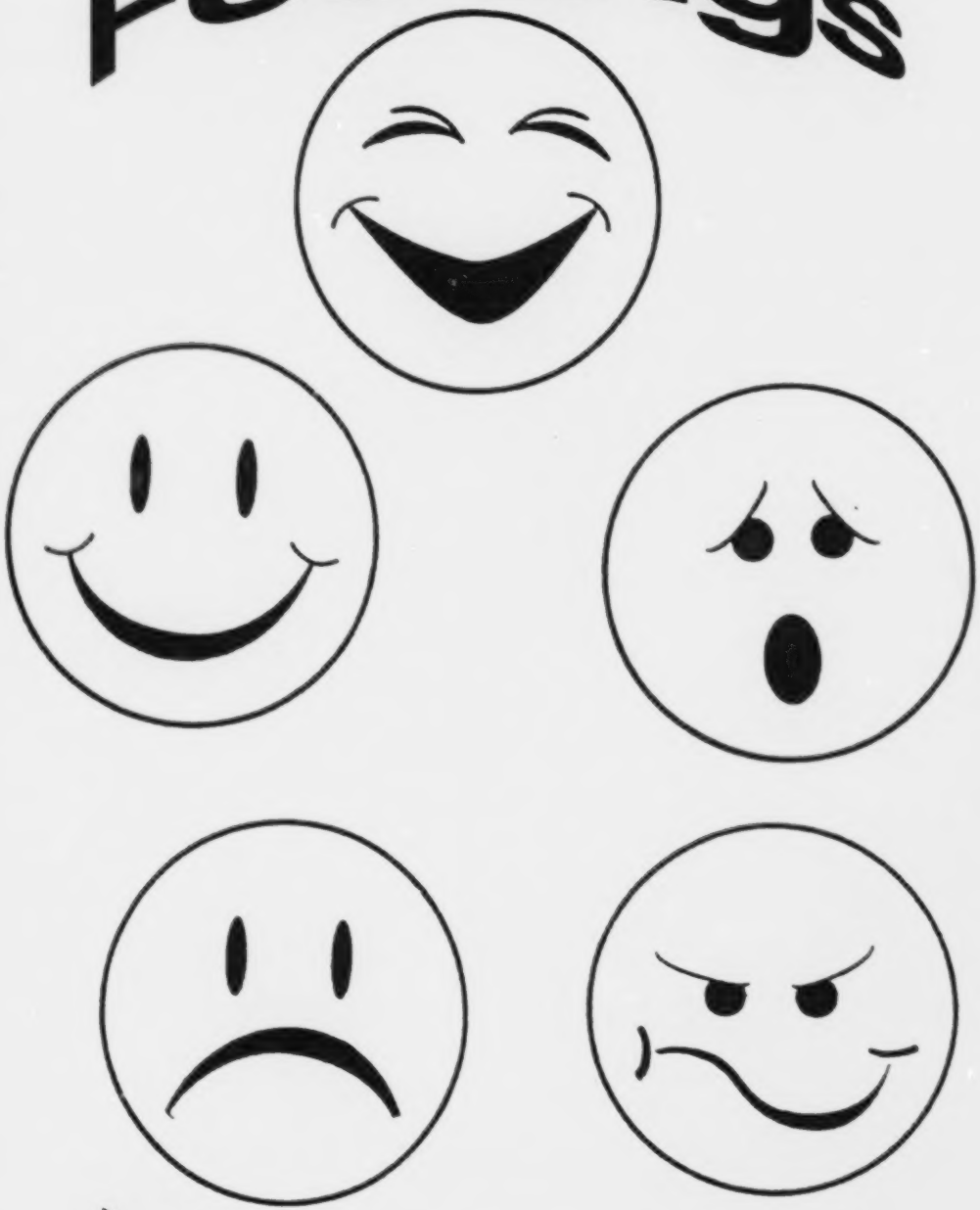
Feeling:

"Your feelings are OK."

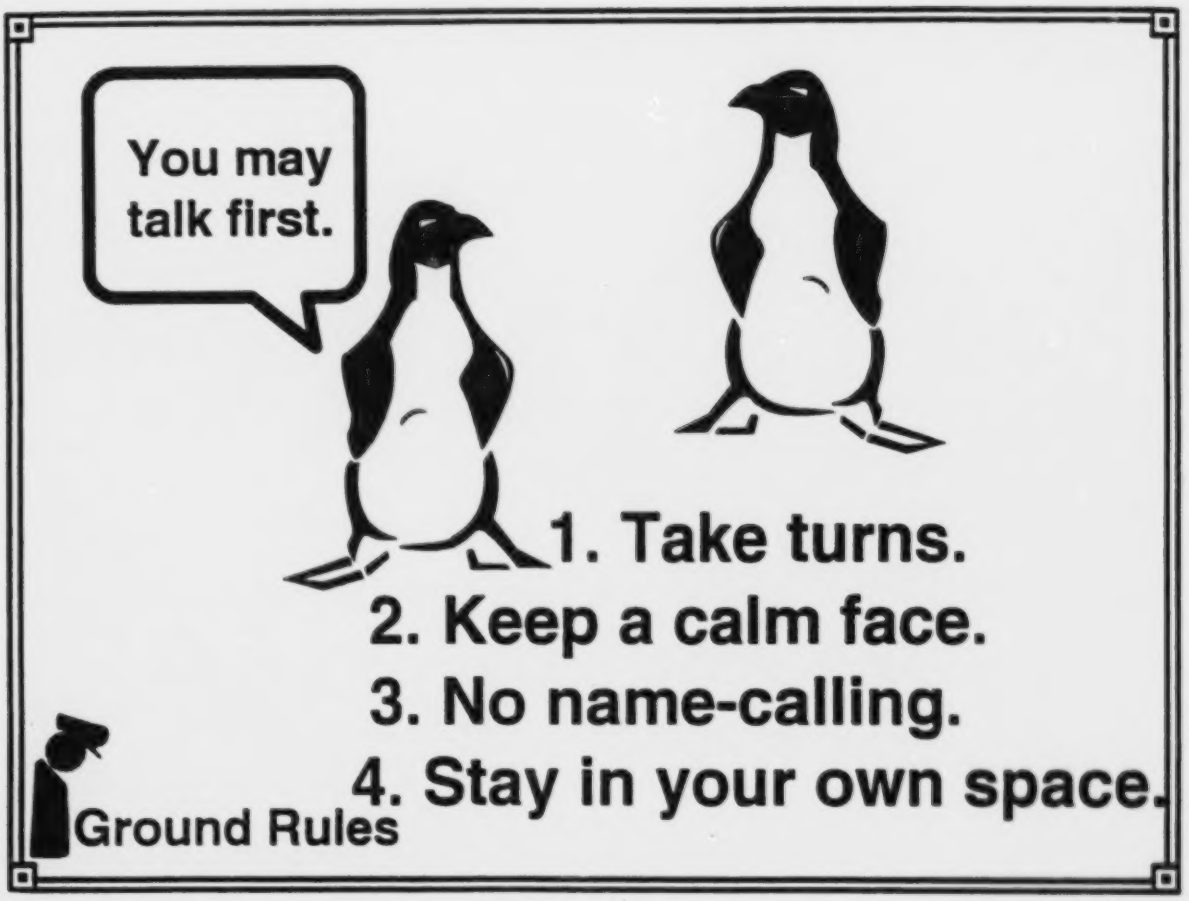
"Wisely choose your actions."

M.F.S. 96 #2

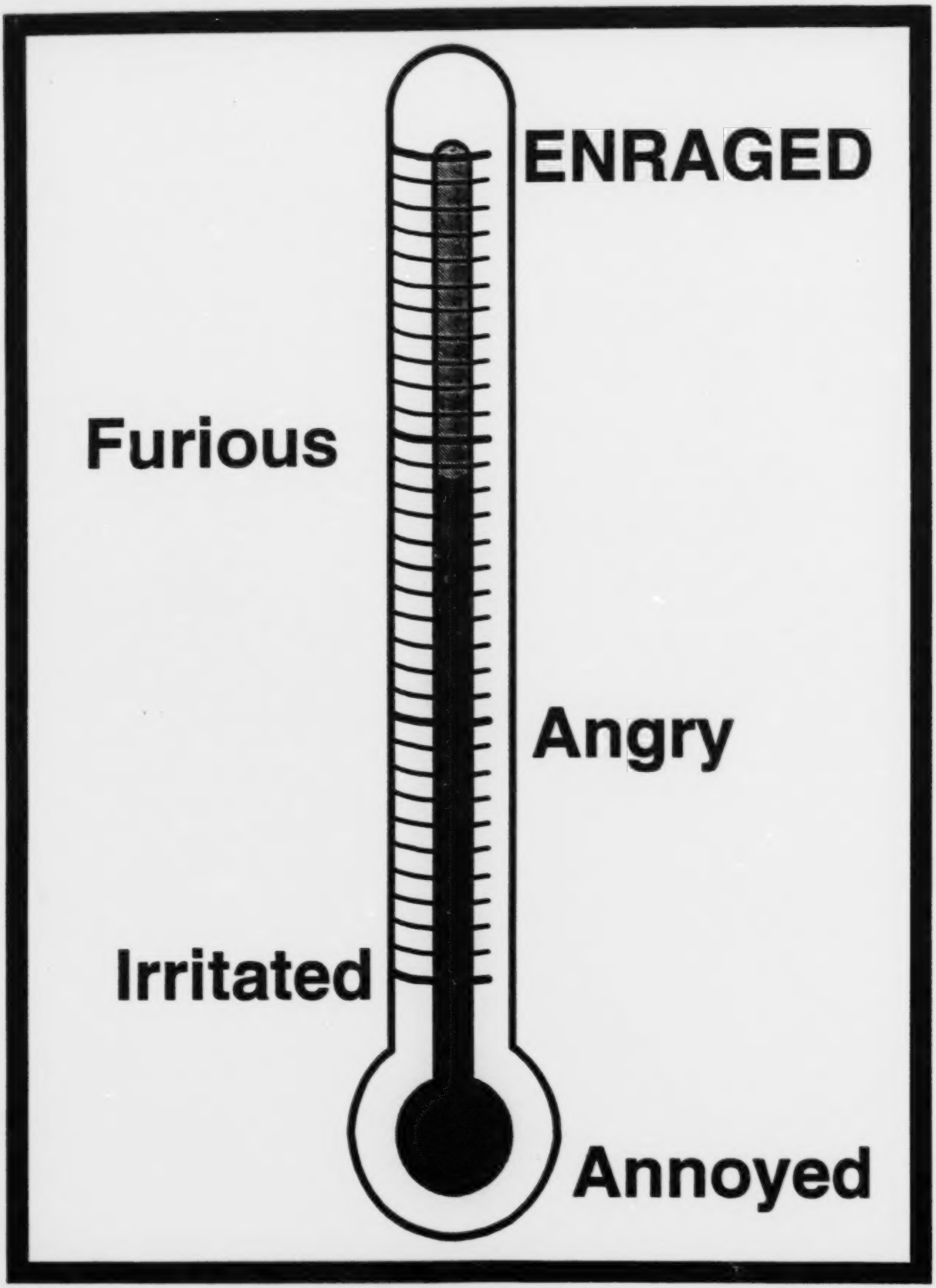
Feelings



Feelings

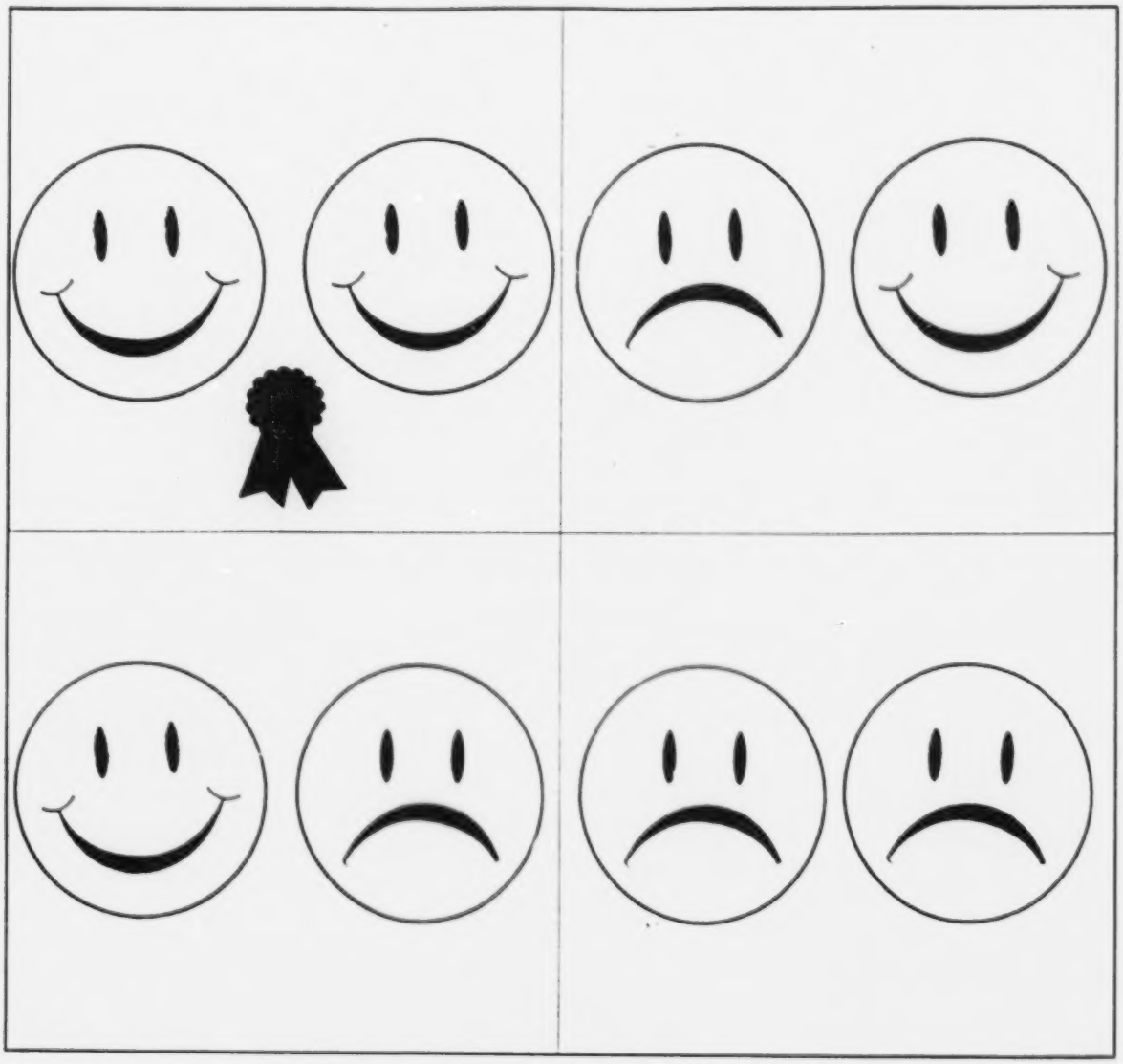

You may talk first.
1. Take turns.
2. Keep a calm face.
3. No name-calling.
4. Stay in your own space.
Ground Rules

#4



#5

Choose a **Win-Win** Solution!



#6

Brainstorming

* Say what comes to mind.

* All ideas are good ideas .

* Use your imagination.

* Keep going until there are no more ideas .

#7

References

Knopf. (1995). *Conflict Resolution Curriculum Guide*. The Knopf Company, Inc., Plymouth, Michigan.

Ramsey, P.G. (1991). *Making Friends in School: Promoting Peer Relationships in Early Childhood Education*. Teachers College Press, New York.

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